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THE CZECHOSLOVAK STATE

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BY

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in the United States*



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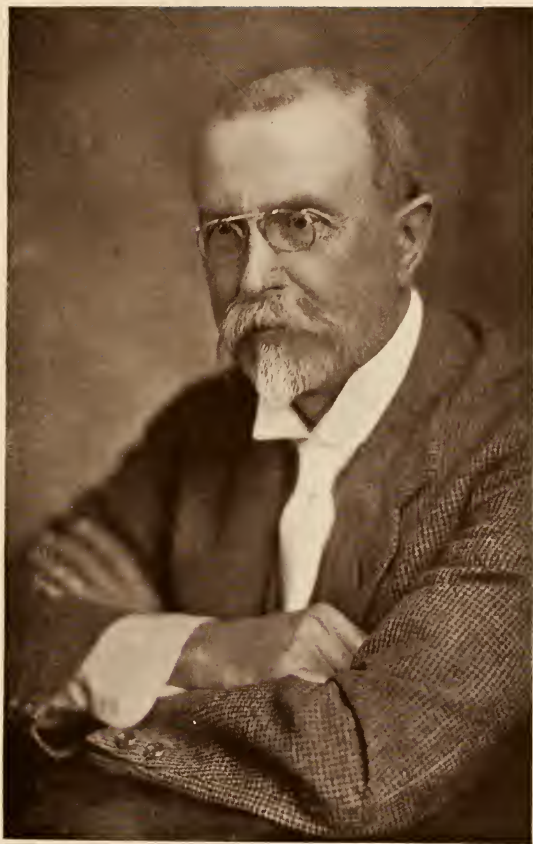
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THE CZECHOSLOVAK STATE

I

DURING the first three years of the World War the heavy hand of Austro-Hungarian despotism, reinforced by the mailed fist of Prussia, permitted nothing in the Czechoslovak lands that even remotely resembled a free expression of opinion. But as soon as the grip of the Central Powers began to weaken, the nation was able again to give expression to its real attitude. It was then that Dr. Jan Herben contributed to the famous Czech daily, the *Národní Listy* of Prague, an article declaring that international law cannot prevent the birth of a new state, and that the time of proclaiming its maturity and capacity to manage its affairs is a nation's own prerogative. But, Dr. Herben says, though the claims of a state to existence arise from its very birth, its existence cannot prevent a certain amount of disarrangement in the relations of the pre-existing states. The new state must be inscribed on the international register. International law must decide whether the new state is to gain admission into the society of old states, whether its culture entitles it to become a law-

ful member, and whether economically and otherwise it can command the respect a sovereign state is entitled to. The corporate stock of Norway in 1905 commanded full respect: in 1913 that of Albania was very low. International recognition is dependent on a sort of examination. The group of old states makes inquiries as to whether the new-born child has the capacity of becoming a member on equal terms, and especially whether it does not bring with it the germs of future disturbance. What would be the result of such an examination, should the Czechoslovak Republic be subjected to one?

Many of the questions asked by Dr. Herben have been answered, and they have been answered in the forms prescribed by international law. All the great Allied powers, and the United States, have recognized the right of the Czechoslovak nation to independence and sovereign statehood. There is in existence a recognized Czechoslovak Government. The United States and her associates in the war are committed to the policy of reëstablishing the ancient Czech state, adjusted to modern conditions, and in harmony with the principles of nationality. Before so committing themselves, these governments naturally ascer-

tained whether not only as a matter of justice, but also as a matter of practical statesmanship this step was possible and advisable, and whether the new state is endowed with all the elements that make for permanency and stability. In the very nature of things, the general public cannot always inform itself as rapidly as governments, and so it occasionally happens that questions are asked such as: Have the Czechoslovaks the innate ability to build, form, or create a state? Have they the culture that is necessary for an independent nation in the modern world? Have they the economic resources necessary for independent existence? I shall endeavor to answer briefly some of these and other questions which necessarily are in the minds of many to-day.

II

Mr. John W. Burgess of Columbia University, in his great work, *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law*, lays down the proposition that the Teutonic nations are the political nations par excellence, and that the Slavs and Greeks lack in political capacity. The history of Bohemia furnishes a refutation of this assumption.

As early as the seventh century, when the historical data relative to Bohemia begin, we find evidences of an established Bohemian state. In the eleventh century Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, and Poland were united under Břetislav I, King of Bohemia, and, in the words of Count Luetzow, the eminent historian, "The idea of a West Slav Empire seemed on the point of being realized, but the Germans stepped in to prevent the formation of a powerful Slav State on their borders." Otokar II, of the House of Přemysl, for a time extended Bohemian rule from the Adriatic to the Baltic. Under the "National King," George of Poděbrad, in the fifteenth century, Bohemia was a European power of the first rank.

All these achievements, attained under sovereigns belonging to houses of Czech origin,

certainly show a high degree of political talent. The fact that later Bohemia succumbed to overwhelming brute force is not proof of want of political capacity.

Perhaps the best proof of the political power of the Czechoslovak nation lies in the way its revolution against Austria-Hungary was conducted and consummated. Like all non-German nations, it was caught unprepared. But without any cue from conventional political leadership, the people to a man adopted an anti-Austrian and anti-German attitude. The Czechoslovak soldier refused to fight, and went over to the Allied armies in order to reënlist with the forces of modern civilization, and even, as in Russia, to form an army of his own. The Czechoslovak National Council very promptly became the directing body of these armies, which submitted voluntarily to its authority. Under this voluntary discipline Czechoslovak troops performed exploits, the story of which will go down in history as one of the noblest classics of all ages. Here surely we have conclusive proof of the ability of the Czechoslovak peoples to govern themselves. At this writing reports from Prague show that the transfer of power from Austrian hands to that of the Czech authorities took place quietly

and without any excesses, so that even the *Berliner Tageblatt* declares that the Czech revolution occurred with dignity, and in a manner showing the high state of Czech culture.

III

What of the spiritual values created by the Czechs in the past and present, what of Czech culture? It is historically established that while the Czechs were ruled by their own kings, and while they were unmolested in their affairs, the nation prospered and grew intellectually in all respects. Bohemian history is replete with manifestations of idealism. Spiritual values have never been underestimated by the Czechs. The Hussite war, while it had its social and economic background, was fought for a religious and civic ideal, and for the rights of the Czech language against the aggression of the Germans.

Palacký, the great Bohemian historian, may have been swayed by national pride, but nevertheless his contention that the Hussite war is "the first war in the world's history that was fought not for material interest, but for intellectual ones, for ideas," is not groundless.

It must always be remembered that the Czech John Hus preceded Luther by a century; that Comenius (Komenský) was one of the greatest educators of all ages; that Peter Chelčický preceded Tolstoy by four hundred years; that

the Czech warrior Žižka is regarded as one of the originators of modern strategy.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, in spite of unexampled persecution and oppression by the governments of Vienna and Budapest, the nation reached a cultural level surpassing that of any other nationality in Austria-Hungary. In literature and arts it is second to none. In modern times it has produced at least three poets of the first rank, Vrchlický, Čech, and Machar. Of the musicians and composers, one need only to mention Smetana, Dvořák, and Kovařovic. Of the novelists there is a legion, and they have given the world real works of art. In philosophy, the names of Masaryk, Krejčí, and Drtina are known to all scholars.

According to the official statistics of the United States Immigration Bureau, of all the immigrants to the United States the Czechs show one of the lowest percentages of illiteracy. Thus, of the 8439 Czech arrivals in this country in the year 1912, there were only 75 illiterates, about .008875 per cent. Almost all the Czech immigrants are skilled workmen or farmers. Their eagerness for knowledge and education is well known. As an illustration, in the schools of the forty northern and east-

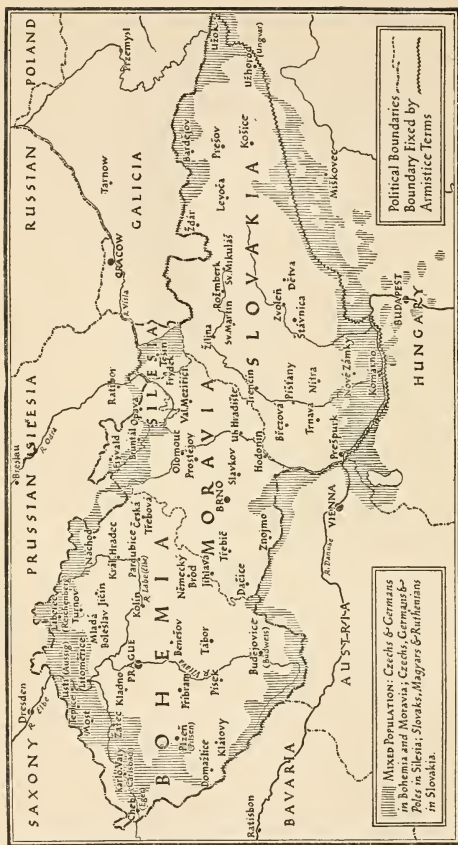
ern counties of Nebraska there are no less than three hundred teachers of Czech parentage, several of whom are superintendents of schools. In Chicago, their natural ethnic centre in America, there are hundreds of Czech physicians, lawyers, teachers, and architects. The buildings of the State of Illinois at the Panama Exposition in San Francisco were designed by a Czech architect. Statistics also show that crimes of the graver sort are practically non-existent among Czechoslovaks.

The Czechoslovaks have their faults and vices, no doubt, the same as all other nationalities, but political juggling is not one of them. The Czechoslovak Declaration of Independence of November 15, 1915, declares that "We take the side of the fighting Slav nations and their Allies, without regard to victory or defeat, because right is on their side. The problem which side is right in this fatal war is a question of principles and of political morals, a question which at present no honest and sincere statesman, no conscientious and thinking nation, can evade."

This statement, I think, represents the best Czech thought on the subject of politics and political morals. To them politics is not a game, but an expression of the nation's hopes and

desires. The best proof of this lies in the fact that the manifesto was issued when the Russian army was forced to retreat from the Carpathians, and when the situation, from the Allies' point of view, was gloomy indeed.

Freedom regained, liberty achieved, such a nation will add still more to the world's spiritual treasures.



IV

But, we are told, the Czechoslovak State will be a small one, and, as a result, its existence precarious, assuming that the world will remain in anything like its present condition of international disorganization.

In the first place, as modern states go, the new state will not be a small one, since it has a population of about twelve millions, and consists of what are commonly called the Bohemian countries, namely, Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia, to which will be added the Slovak districts of North Hungary, from Ungvar, through Kaschau along the ethnographical boundaries down the river Ipoly (Eipel) to the Danube, including Pressburg and the whole Slovak north to the frontier line of Hungary. The Slovaks are the branch of the nation that has suffered under Magyar domination. Time and again they have accepted the programme of Czechoslovak union. The extent of the new state will be about 50,000 English square miles: Belgium has 11,373 square miles. It is obvious that the new state can hardly be classed as small.

Moreover, the belief in the necessity for large states, prevalent in a certain school of

economic and political theorists, and largely based upon teachings of Karl Marx, is one of the superstitions that periodically appear, in order to be abandoned upon a sober second thought. The reaction against it has already set in, as evidenced by an address delivered some time ago by Mr. L. P. Jacks, editor of the *Hibbert Journal*, before the London Sociological Society.

Mr. Jacks thinks that before long we shall see the rise of a new criticism of the whole idea of government. What, he asks, are the limits of government? Will not the tendency be to eliminate a number of unmanageable propositions from the scope of human design? Mr. Jacks believes that the next great movement of political thought will be in the direction of restricting rather than expanding, concentrating rather than spreading, the objects of social endeavor. The deeper thought, he says, starts from the human end of the problem; its first principle is that "industrial civilization is made for man, not man for industrial civilization." Viscount Bryce thinks that possibly some modern states have become too big to manage. Mr. Justice Louis D. Brandeis once showed pretty conclusively that even under modern conditions certain

business concerns can become so large that their successful administration becomes almost physically impossible. May this not be equally true of states?

The theory that small states and nations cannot succeed is not borne out by history. Even prior to the war there were in Europe twenty-seven states, and the great majority of these were small. There were only six of the so-called great powers: Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, England, France, and Italy. Portugal, Denmark, Switzerland, Bulgaria, Belgium, Norway, Sweden, Serbia, Greece, Holland, Montenegro, and Turkey all are, or were, smaller than the Czechoslovak Republic. The last named will hold in Europe the eighth place, only England, Germany, Poland, France, Italy, Spain, and Russia being larger.

V

In so far as any state is economically and commercially self-sustaining, that of the Czechoslovaks will be able to stand upon its own feet. Even prior to the war, economically and financially Bohemia was one of the richest of the Austrian "provinces." Of the burden of Austrian taxation, 62.7 per cent was borne by the Czech countries, while the rest of Austria carried only 37.3 per cent. And now, freed from oppressive taxation, levied in order to lighten the burden upon purely Austrian districts incapable of maintaining themselves, the Czechs will be even richer.

The Bohemian lands surpassed what were once the other Austrian lands in the production of grain. Of the grain lands of the former Austrian Empire, thirty-eight per cent is found in Bohemia. Eighty-three per cent of Austrian coal is mined in the Bohemian lands. Sixty per cent of the Austrian iron is located there. Ninety per cent, if not more, of the beet sugar factories of Austria are located in the lands of the Bohemian Crown; the textile industry is of large proportions, and leather, paper, furniture, and electro-technical industries are of importance.

The *Encyclopaedia Americana* states the industrial resources of Bohemia as follows:

“The industry of Bohemia, favored by its central situation, has long rendered it one of the most important governments of the Austrian Empire. Spinning and weaving are extensively carried on in the northern and southeastern districts; manufactures of lace, ribbons, metal and wood work, chemical products, and other branches of skilled industry are also largely developed. Pottery, porcelain, glassware, cutting of precious stones, give employment to many hands. The glassware of Bohemia alone, which is known all over Europe, employs 50,000 workers. Large quantities of beer (Pilsener) of the kind known as lager are exported. Prague, the capital, is the centre of the manufactures and of the commerce of the country. The largest towns are Prague, Pilsen, Reichenberg, Budweis, Teplitz, Aussig, and Eger. For internal intercourse there are excellent highways, extending to ten thousand miles, and several important lines of railway leading both south-east to Vienna and northwest to Dresden.”

Slovakia, forming the northern part of what we used to know as Hungary, has been very much neglected, its mineral resources still

remaining undeveloped. United to the Czech countries, it will be a source of strength to the Czechoslovak State. In 1913 one-third of all the iron, gold, and silver mined in Hungary was mined in Slovakia.

These figures are sufficient to show that Austria actually was a parasite living on the wealth of the Czech countries.

VI

But of what avail, we may be asked, will all these resources prove, since Bohemia has no port, having a seashore only in Shakespeare?

Switzerland shows how a state can prosper, though land-locked. In any event, with modern means of communication, direct access to the sea is not as important as it was in the past. The sea, after all, is a means of communication: whether the means of communication be the ocean or the railroad, the means do not make so much difference.

The demand for what has been called economic rights of way for land-locked states is becoming more and more insistent, and there is back of it all the prestige of the United States of America, for in his message of January 8, 1917, the President formulated the principle that free access to the sea must be granted to inland countries.

The idea of a corridor between the South Slav and Czechoslovak states has been advocated. Such a corridor would give the latter access to the Serbo-Croatian ports. This is admittedly a difficult question, but it is obvious that for many reasons it would be well so to arrange the boundaries as to make these two

Slav commonwealths neighbors. The idea has been attacked as imperialistic and contrary to the principle of nationality. Whatever may be thought of it, it is not contrary to the latter as is contended by some, because the strip in question, consisting of two present Hungarian counties, and a part of a third, contains a large number of Slavs.

In the north the new state will border on a united Poland, with whom relations will certainly be very friendly. This will assure an outlet to the Baltic.

Another way of gaining access to seaports is by internationalization of such waterways as the Elbe and the Danube. It is probable that internationalization of waterways will be a feature of the coming international readjustment, and that a free Danube will connect the Czechoslovaks with the Jugoslavs and Rumanians in the south.

VII

Lately, both in America and Great Britain, a certain apprehension has been expressed over the possible fate of the German minority in Bohemia. In Central and Eastern Europe hardly any state can be constructed without national minorities. The rights of these minorities must be safeguarded, of course. But one cannot help remarking that the gentlemen who now feel that the Czech majority might oppress the German minority, seldom, if ever, exhibited the solicitude they now show when it was a question of the German minority oppressing the Czech majority.

The official Austrian statistics showed the following distribution of population according to nationality:

SLAVS:	Czechoslovaks	8.4 million	} 24.2 million
	Jugoslavs	6.8 million	
	Poles	5 million	
	Ruthenes	4 million	
<i>Latins:</i>	Italians	0.8 million	} 4 million
	Rumanians	3.2 million	
GERMANS:		12 million	} 22 million
MAGYARS:		10 million	
OTHERS:			} 1 million
	<i>Total</i>	51	
			<i>million</i>

But these official statistics are notoriously false, and grossly exaggerated in favor of the Germans and Magyars. It must be remembered that the Austrian census is not based upon nationality, but upon what is called the language of intercourse (*Umgangssprache*), and that, furthermore, in districts with large Czech minorities, or even actual majorities, economic pressure was brought to bear upon workmen dependent upon German masters of industry to declare their language of intercourse to be German. It has been ascertained by the Czech National Council in Prague that in western and northwestern Bohemia, which the Germans claim to be wholly German territory, there are 271,542 members of various Czech national organizations. Private but absolutely reliable statistics indicate that the percentage of Germans in Bohemia can hardly be more than twenty per cent, as against the thirty-seven percent shown by the official census. Conditions in Hungary are even worse. There the Magyars officially form fifty-one per cent of the population, but hold four hundred and five seats in the Parliament, out of a total of four hundred and thirteen. The following table, compiled by authorities on the ethnical situation in Austria-Hungary, affords

a more reliable basis for judging conditions in Austria-Hungary than the official census.

SLAVS:	Czechoslovaks	10	<i>million</i>	} 27 <i>million</i>
	Jugoslavs	7.5	<i>million</i>	
	Poles	5	<i>million</i>	
	Ruthenes	4.5	<i>million</i>	
<i>Latins:</i>	Italians	1	<i>million</i>	} 5 <i>million</i>
	Rumanians	4	<i>million</i>	
GERMANS:		10	<i>million</i>	} 18 <i>million</i>
MAGYARS:		8	<i>million</i>	
OTHERS:				1 <i>million</i>
	<i>Total</i>			51 <i>million</i>

I show these figures merely to indicate that the problem is not as difficult as the Germans endeavor to make it appear. In any event, because the Germans and Magyars oppress the Czechoslovaks, it does not follow that the latter will oppress the former. It is a significant fact that during the whole of the nineteenth century not a single Czech statesman advocated, even indirectly, the oppression of other peoples. On the contrary, the Czechs always emphasized the fact that they would accord their German citizens complete civil rights, which, of course, include cultural rights. The great Czech historian and statesman, Palacký, said that we never had, nor ever shall have, the intention of oppressing

other people; that, true to our character, rejecting all desire for the revenge of past wrongs, we extend our right hand to all our neighbors who are prepared to recognize the equality of all nations without regard to their size or political power. Havlíček, the Czech leader in 1848, said that oppression never produces good results, and in time brings vengeance upon the heads of its own originators.

However, it should be pointed out here that the principle of self-determination of nations is frequently confused with that of the rights of national minorities. In the *Právnícké Rozhledy* of Prague for May, 1918, the Czech jurist, Dr. J. Kaláb, discusses the claim sometimes made that the idea of self-determination of nations cannot be realized, because in almost every territory there are found members of foreign nations. Those who reason in this way, he declares, fail to differentiate between the principle of self-determination of nations and the principle of civic liberty. Both are derived from the principle of people's sovereignty. But civic liberty determines the legal status of each individual, whereas the self-determination of nations determines the status of entire nations. The nation as a whole, as a cultural unit, cannot be subordinate to any

one else. But that does not mean that every individual whom fate might have blown into the midst of another nation is entitled to demand the right of self-determination. He, like every one else, is entitled to civic liberty.

Self-determination of nations is something substantially different from national autonomy. National autonomy is the right of citizens of a certain nationality to have the conditions of their cultural development guaranteed in a state ruled by another culture, or the manner in which the state shall guarantee to members of a foreign nationality their civic liberty. Self-determination, on the other hand, constitutes the demand that the nation as a whole shall have the opportunity to make use of all its powers in the service of its national interests so that it may enforce its individuality in all directions, including the life of the state, of course within the limitations set by international law.

The Czechoslovaks have pledged themselves to grant the German minority in Bohemia full liberty and equal rights. In fact, they are in favor of an international law protecting the rights of national minorities, and it may be one of the functions of the future League of Nations to see to it that national

minorities are protected against attempts at denationalization.

Czechoslovak minorities outside of the state will also exist, and, judging from past German history, will need this protection. Let it never be forgotten that there is a Czech minority of at least 400,000 in Vienna, and that there will be Czechoslovak minorities elsewhere in lower Austria, as well as in Hungary, even though the latter be reduced as near as possible to its proper ethnical boundaries.

VIII

While fully conscious that the future Czechoslovak State will be strong, and not wholly powerless against aggression, yet we understand that if the independence of smaller nations is to be safeguarded, a new international arrangement must be substituted for the heretofore prevailing system of shifting alliances.

During the demonstrations in Prague on May 17, 1918, a resolution was passed at a meeting described by the Czech press as the Congress of Oppressed Nations of Austria-Hungary. Among those who adopted the resolution were representatives of all Czechoslovak and Yugoslav parties, Rumanian and Italian deputies, and Polish representatives. The resolution includes the following paragraph:

“The representatives of Slav and Latin nations who for centuries past have suffered under foreign oppression, assembled in Prague this seventeenth day of May, 1918, united in a common purpose to do everything in their power to assure full liberty and independence to their respective nations after this terrible war. They are agreed that a better future for their nations will be founded and assured by a world democracy, *by a real and sovereign*

national self-government, and by a universal League of Nations endowed with the necessary authority."

The jurisdiction, authority, and power of a League of Nations will be largely a matter of growth. It is not to be expected that the League will immediately possess the authority it ultimately should achieve. Until such time all nations that have fought together in the present war must hold themselves in readiness to resist new schemes of German aggression, for it cannot be expected that the German, nurtured for decades upon schemes of conquest, will immediately abandon ideas which for so long a time have been the motive power of German statesmanship, including the German Social Democracy, led by such men as Scheidemann and Cunow. The latter, in 1914, in an article in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, endeavored to prove the proposition that small nations, such as Belgium, have lost their right to exist.

IX

Of the constitution of the new state perhaps little need be said. The Czechoslovaks are a democratic nation, and the Declaration of Independence issued by the Czechoslovak Provisional Government on October 19, 1918, succinctly outlines the future constitution in so far as this can be done prior to the decisions of the Constituent Assembly. It states:

“The Czechoslovak State shall be a republic. In constant endeavor for progress it will guarantee complete freedom of conscience, religion and science, literature and art, speech, the press, and the right of assembly and petition. The Church shall be separated from the State. Our democracy shall rest on universal suffrage; women shall be placed on an equal footing with men politically, socially and culturally. The rights of the minority shall be safeguarded by proportional representation; national minorities shall enjoy equal rights. The government shall be parliamentary in form and shall recognize the principles of initiative and referendum. The standing army will be replaced by militia.

“The Czechoslovak Nation will carry out

“far-reaching social and economic reforms;
“the large estates will be redeemed for home
“colonization, patents of nobility will be abol-
“ished. Our nation will assume its part of the
“Austro-Hungarian pre-war public debt;—
“the debts for this war we leave to those who
“incurred them.

“In its foreign policy the Czechoslovak
“Nation will accept its full share of respon-
“sibility in the reorganization of Eastern
“Europe. It accepts fully the democratic and
“social principle of nationality and subscribes
“to the doctrine that all covenants and trea-
“ties shall be entered into openly and frankly
“without secret diplomacy.

“Our constitution shall provide an efficient,
“rational, and just government, which will
“exclude all special privileges and prohibit
“class legislation.”

X

The Czechoslovaks stand before the public opinion of the world with a firm consciousness that their cause is just, and that they have fought for it cleanly and fairly. They proudly maintain that their shield is without a stain. They are simply asking and fighting for what is due them, and for nothing more. They have never been guilty of oppression; they have never sought what properly belongs to their neighbors. They have proved their case to the very hilt. The white and red flag of the Czechoslovak State has been raised, never to come down again.

Washington, D. C.

December, 1918

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CHARLES PERGLER





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